

Curtains?

The Town of Hopkinton is celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2015 and has taken this opportunity to pursue a range of projects dedicated to celebrating our town's rich history. One project is to restore 3 painted theatre curtains that were in use across our town in the 1930s and beyond as the backdrop to a range of cultural events.

What are Painted Curtains?

Scenery painted on fabric, used as the front and backdrops for community performances from the 1890s to the 1940s; they were a primary artistic feature in the cultural life of

almost every town in northern New England. The curtains were permanently installed on rollers, available as set backdrops for traveling troupes, speakers, locally-produced

theatrical performances and variety shows. Most hung in town halls, where politics and entertainment took place in one central building with a stage. Others hung in grange halls, and some played a part in ceremonies. The scenes feature European country views, vistas of local importance, house interiors, and street scenes; some also served as advertising venues in which local businesses are seen as sponsors.

Each of Hopkinton's painted curtains is in need of stabilization. Our goal is to conserve and re-hang three of the scenes in Hopkinton's public halls (Town Hall and Hopkinton Town Library) in the fall of 2015, and to stabilize and store the remaining pieces so that they can be used once again to adorn Hopkinton's stages in the future

How to help:

- Detail work – use sponges and brushes to remove 80 years worth of dirt from the painted surface. Volunteers will be trained in conservation techniques and will work with the conservator's guidance. We'll work in shifts over a period of four to five days.
- Photographers – photo document this community effort.
- Hang the curtains – this is the heavy lifting part of the project. Curtains will be installed at Town Hall and Hopkinton Town Library.
- Provide lunch – for the conservators and volunteers each day.
- Donations – of money to cover costs or in-kind materials of lumber and hardware to hang the curtains.
- Monetary donation checks may be made out to Town of Hopkinton; write "Curtain Restoration Project" in the memo line (Town of Hopkinton, 330 Main St., Hopkinton, NH 03229).

For Further Information, Contact:

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Save Our Curtains



All donations benefit the restoration and permanent display of 3 curtains

**A collaboration between
Hopkinton Historical
Society
and
The Town of Hopkinton**



History of Hopkinton's Painted Curtains

Hopkinton's curtains were painted in the 1930s, a time when entertainment was of great importance during difficult economic conditions. Each curtain was professionally painted, speaking to the importance that the community placed on theatrical entertainment. Hopkinton had several halls that were used for entertainment during the 1930s, including Columbia Hall in Contoocook and Lyceum Hall (the upstairs of Town Hall) in Hopkinton which also served as the meeting space for the New Union Grange. Historic photos of both of these halls show the use of grand painted curtains on theatrical stages.

Fast-forward to 1992 when a pile of 13- to 17-foot-long painted fabric rolls on various types of rollers needed to be moved to accommodate an antique show on the 2nd floor of Hopkinton's Town Hall. One of the rolls went to the Hopkinton Historical Society, several went to a town storage shed, and smaller bits stayed on or under the stage at Town Hall. Other than storage, the rolls remained untouched until 2009, when the Vermont-based organization "Curtains Without Borders – Preserving Historic Painted Scenery," along with the NH Preservation Alliance, conducted a grant-funded state-wide survey of New Hampshire's painted curtains, as had already been done in Vermont. Over 100 curtains were found in New Hampshire in various states of repair or decay. Hopkinton's six curtains and six side pieces were included in that survey.

The not-for-profit conservation firm, Curtains Without Borders (www.curtainswithoutborders.com), will oversee the repair and hanging effort, with volunteers from the Hopkinton community. Each of the three curtains to be hung will cost \$3,500-\$4,000 in conservator and materials fees. The successful efforts of Curtains Without Borders working with local volunteers can be seen in several local communities including Henniker, Danbury, Hancock, Hillsboro.

Curtain Details

- The Gideon Gould House Grand Drape (10' high by 17' long) depicts one of Hopkinton's oldest houses, surrounded with formal drapery. Gideon Gould was the son of one of Township No. 5's original proprietors, and the house still stands on Rollins Rd. The curtain is signed Pasquaney Art Studios (Plymouth, NH), and dated 1935. It is thought to be the work of well-known painter, Arthur Ives.
- Street Scene Advertising Drape (10' high by 17' long) shows a generic street scene with every building, sign, and even a dirigible advertising a local Contoocook, Hopkinton, or Concord business. Twenty-four businesses have been identified so far. This form was common for Grange Hall stage curtains. This one was made circa 1935 and is attributed to well-known painter, Robert Naves.
- Italianate Villa Grand Drape (10' high by 13' long) shows an elaborate villa with garden, river, bridge, and flowers, all behind a grand pink drapery. This scene would have likely been used as the backdrop to many productions, and can now be used in that same way; it speaks to the importance of theatre in Hopkinton during the difficult times of the 1930s.

